INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR 1990

UNITED NATIONS

dear children,

Do you like reading books? Have you ever thought about what it would be like if you could n

Many years ago, there were f and many of them did not go to school. Reading was a special activity that only privileged people could enjoy. The world h become a better place now because most people can go school and learn to read. But there are still many who are so lucky.

The United Nations has decided to mak 990 Interna-tional Literacy Year so that people all ov about the importance of being abl and write, help people who cannot to do so.

By the time that you have children and grandchild there will be many more learn how to produce enoug protect our environment. For everyone to live decently, people will need education. It is a big job; people and Governments and the United Nations will all have to work toge

This leaflet can help you to think a usefulness of reading and counting. It should lp you to think about why education is important and how y use your education to improve your communities.

Let's join hands in celebrating Interna Literacy Year so that all people will be able to have the edu they need to help build a better world.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar
Secretary-General

what does it mean to kno
how to read?
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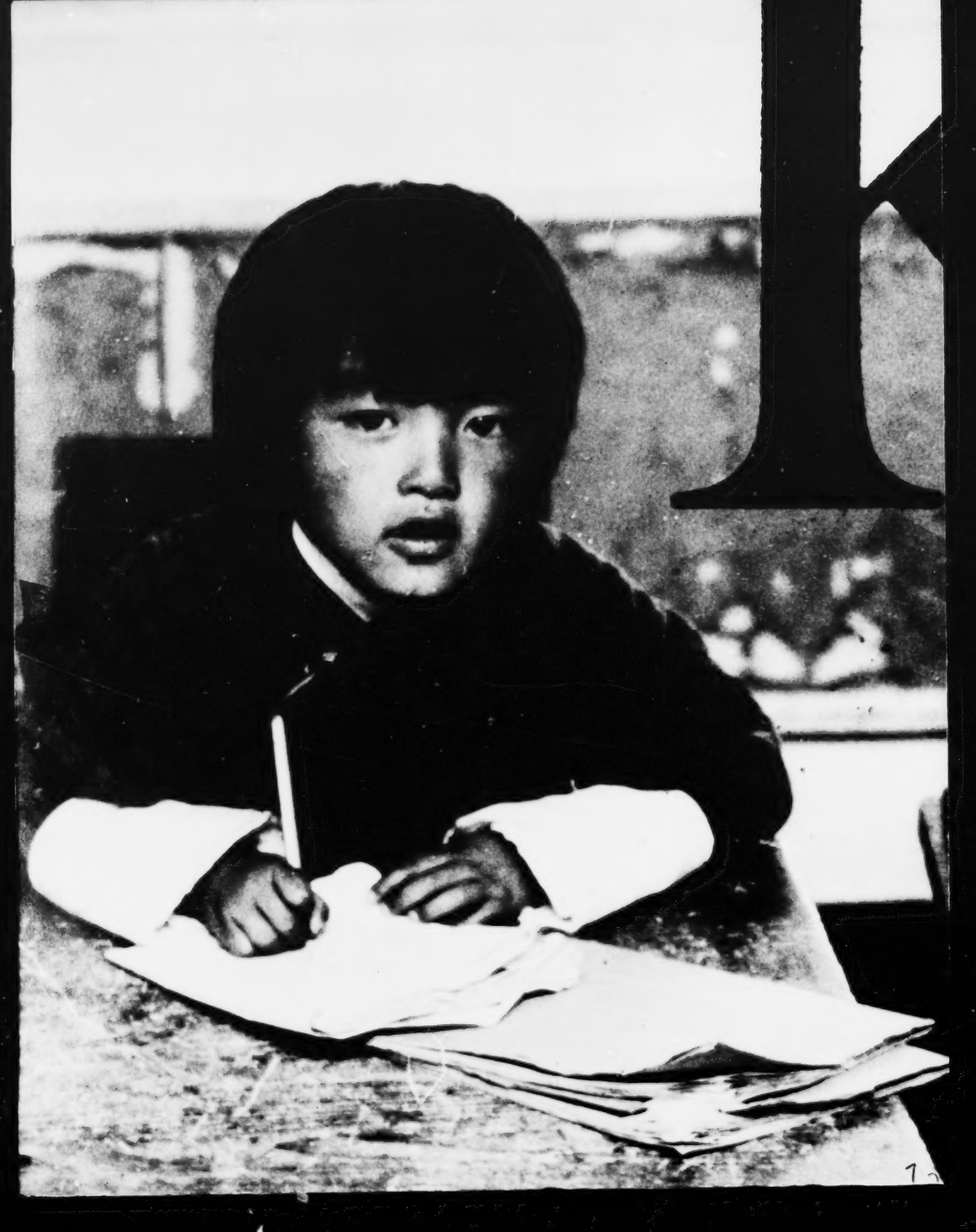
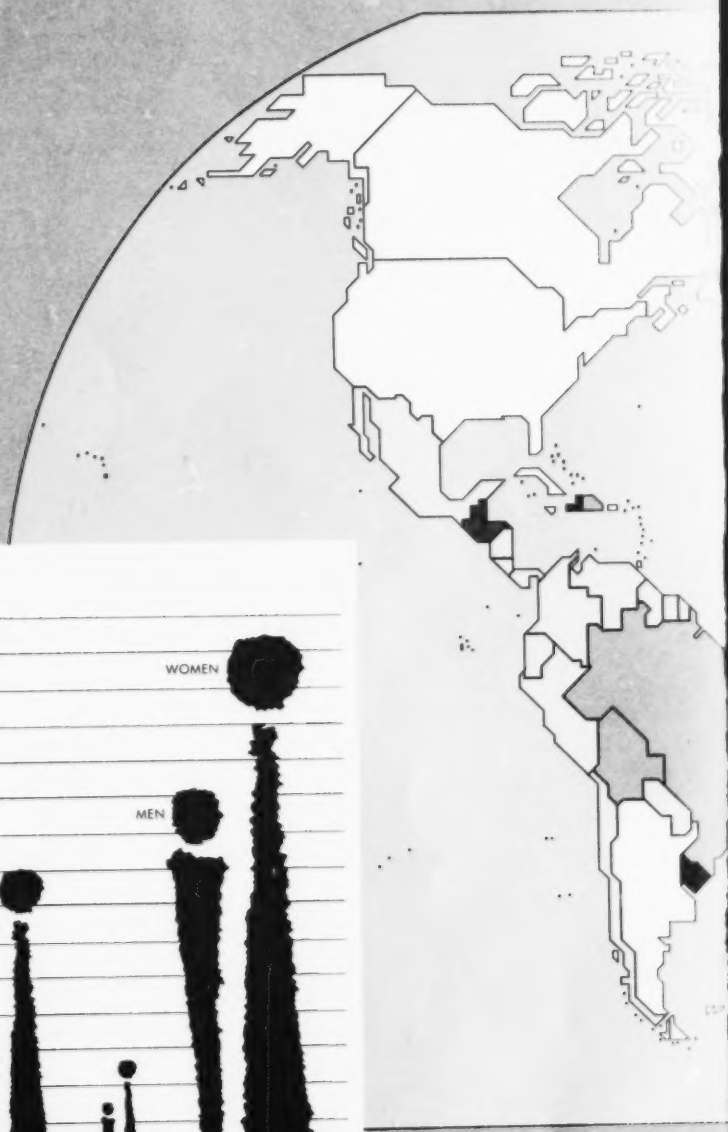
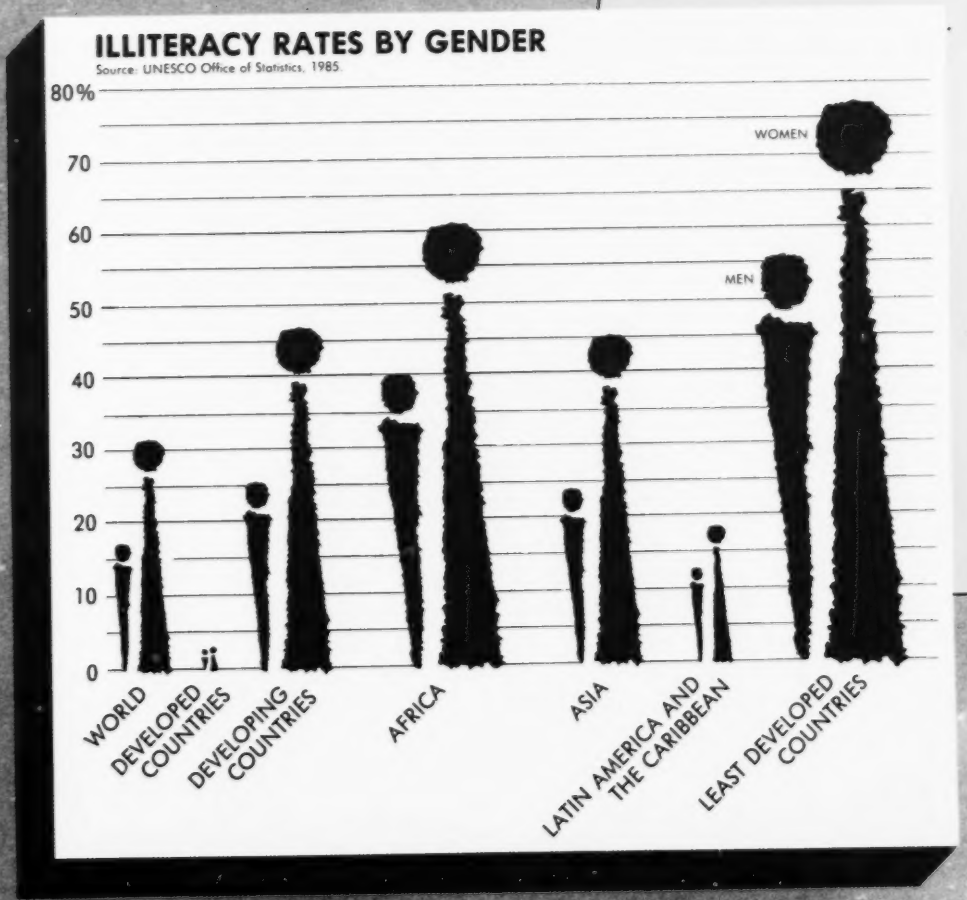
Laura
7428 MADISON ST., FO
BIG SKY COUNTRY

what would your community be like if everyone were literate?



what does literacy mean to the world?





The boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
LESS THAN 5%
5%-19%
20%-39%
40%-59%
60% AND UP
NOT AVAILABLE

some teaching suggestions

This section suggests ways you can help your pupils to explore some of the questions raised in the leaflet. They are not prescriptive but are intended to stimulate your own ideas on teaching about the subject of literacy, which is so important to people everywhere.

I. WHY TEACH ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS AND LITERACY?

The overall goal of international education is to help young people to understand the world and their part in it. This can be done by teaching about some local concern of your pupils and then what the United Nations is doing about it.

International Literacy Year offers excellent opportunities for such education. The theme is both local and international. It will link your pupils' concerns with those of children around the world. It is close to their own learning experience. Your pupils can explore what literacy means to them personally and how it affects all people's lives today. The theme also has social aspects: each person's right to education and how literacy may be used to improve communities. While exploring the international dimensions of literacy, children will learn much about United Nations principles and activities.

Exploring literacy can be educationally rewarding. The topic lends itself to a wide range of approaches and methods, involving not only factual learning but also feelings and action. It will reinforce all you are already doing to have your pupils understand the importance of mastering the three Rs and to develop habits of lifelong learning.

II. WHAT AND HOW—POSSIBLE FOCUSES AND TECHNIQUES

This leaflet is divided roughly into four panels. The first attempts to give pupils an idea of how it feels to be illiterate, and then to have them think about literacy through the Secretary-General's letter. The second panel asks pupils to think about the act of reading—the joy it brings them and how useful it is. The third and fourth panels attempt to broaden the topic of literacy and help pupils to see it in a world context as well as in their own local community context.

A. Literacy and the Local Community

You may wish to begin by relating the topic to your pupils' own daily lives or aspirations—the pleasure and independence they derive from being able to write, read and calculate and how this will help them when they are grown up.

for upper primary teachers

Learning and Pleasure. Instead of defining literacy in words, you may prefer to start with the pleasure literacy can bring. Ask your pupils what they most enjoy reading (i.e. myths, stories about heroes, children or families in situations similar or different from their own, etc.). As for writing, they probably find pleasure in writing about their own lives and feelings or being able to create their own story "books". They might learn about different alphabets and characters in different languages and try to write their names in another language. Many children also enjoy the challenge of "figuring out" in arithmetic or discovering "how things work".

Literacy and Personal Development. The questions asked in the leaflet are not intended to elicit factual information. Rather they should spur pupils to actively try to understand what literacy and learning mean to them. The visual images presented are there to help pupils broaden their imagination and understanding.

You may wish to change the first question posed—"What does it mean to know how to read?"—to "What do I want my life to be when I grow up? How will literacy help me?". In this way literacy will be seen as a first step, making possible a lifelong journey of discovery and growth.

Pupils' ideas of literacy will undoubtedly go further than the three Rs and may encompass most of the current definition: literacy means the knowledge and skills people need to function, develop and contribute to their societies.

To explore these questions you have many ways to choose from, such as individual or group inquiry, writing, drama or discussion. Even more effective is the way you teach. Instead of only talking about the rewards of literacy and lifelong learning, you will want your pupils to experience the pleasure, skills and independence literacy brings. This will entail giving pupils opportunities for active inquiry and discovery and creative expression. Each child should be praised for her or his particular contribution, and marking or hierarchical evaluation should be de-emphasized.

Education and Social Responsibility. In most places children realize that they are fortunate to be able to have education and that there are others, sometimes many others, who lack that privilege. They will feel that this is "not fair", that no one should be left out and that everyone should have the same opportunity for education. They will want to "do something", perhaps using their own learning to benefit others.

They can appraise the ways their learning might be used to improve the school or community and can carry out some constructive project. Pupils might find out whether there are people who cannot read in their communities, and if so, how many of them are women and how many are men. They can draw a large mural of a future community in which there is no illiteracy. They may even try to improve the literacy of younger pupils.

B. Literacy and the World Community

There are many parallels between the local and world communities. The insights your pupils developed at the individual and local levels can help them understand why the United Nations is concerned about literacy.

By learning what the United Nations is doing about literacy, pupils will come to understand the basic principles of the United Nations and the ways in which a world community works. They should:

- empathize with human beings everywhere and their needs and hopes;
- appreciate how the members of the United Nations are working together for a better tomorrow;
- develop a sense of social responsibility and contribute in their own ways to world-wide literacy efforts.

In the early stages of most civilizations, only a few people were literate; these elite kept the records and helped those in power conduct the affairs of society. Over the centuries, literacy became more widespread. By the time the United Nations was established, about half the world's people were literate. Since then, thanks partly to UNESCO efforts, even more people have become literate. But this is not enough. In order to construct the better world envisaged in the United Nations Charter, ALL people will need to be educated.

Human Rights. The equality of human beings and each person's right to develop to the fullest are ideas central to both education and the United Nations. Adult students, as well as children, learn better when they are treated with respect and their work is appreciated.

Education and Development. When pupils examine why education is important to their individual lives and to the improvement of the local community, this will also help them to appreciate why the United Nations considers education so necessary for development.

Full Participation. As in all United Nations work, people need to work together. For International Literacy Year, each member State has agreed to contribute in some way. The United Nations agencies concerned with education are co-operating on programmes to provide more and better literacy teaching. UNESCO helps educators to exchange accounts of effective literacy projects and to improve their teaching. UNICEF supports community efforts to build schools and develop local reading materials. WHO, ILO, FAO and other agencies help according to their particular expertise.

C. How Everyone Can Help

International Literacy Year means that everyone can do something so that those who have not had a chance to become literate can learn the skills and knowledge they and their societies need. Although young children find actual literacy teaching difficult, they can participate in ways which use their own literacy skills and which satisfy their wish to help. For example, they could write and illustrate simple materials for learners, such as simple stories or arithmetic problems using local marketing situations.

This experience in world-wide good citizenship is extremely important. Children should see that the need for more and better educated people is world-wide, that action to increase literacy must also be world-wide and that what they do locally is a valued part of that effort to better people's lives.

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